

PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION RECORD

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Dee Laws, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Flooding, IDBs and Building Control	Service: Planning Policy
CMT Officer: Carol Pilson, Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer	Delegated Power Being Exercised: Non-executive decision
Subject of Decision: Purchase of Landscape Support Services - Planning	

Decision Taken:

To approve the extension of the contract for landscape support services until April 2028, to support the Council's engagement with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and its local plan-making and decision-taking functions.

Reasons for the Decision:

The Planning Service is seeking approval to extend its current landscape support contract through to April 2028, at a value of up to £120,000.

The appointed consultancy has been providing landscape advice to the Council since November 2024, primarily supporting work on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), including the proposed Fens Reservoir. The contract was originally let on a temporary basis while the Council explored the option of recruiting an in-house Landscape Architect.

However, considering recent announcements regarding local government restructuring, and now that there is a clearer understanding of the scale and duration of the workload, it is considered more practical and cost-effective to continue with external specialist support. This approach is consistent with existing arrangements for securing arboricultural advice for planning.

The current provider has established effective working relationships with internal teams and external partners. They have attended multiple project briefings and reviewed detailed technical submissions, enabling the Council to respond to NSIP proposals effectively and within statutory timescales. Retaining this expertise will ensure continuity and allow the Council to continue to influence the design and development of major infrastructure projects at a critical stage.

Over the coming months, the Council will be required to engage proactively in the preparation of several Development Consent Orders. This will include responding to statutory and non-statutory consultations and participating in technical working groups, including those focused on landscape and master planning. Landscape advice may also be required to support large-scale or sensitive planning applications and emerging planning policy documents, including the Local Plan.

Without dedicated landscape support in place, there is a risk that the Council would be unable to fully assess and respond to complex technical documentation. This could result in missed issues with potential adverse impacts on local communities, the environment, and the quality of new development.

The contract will be funded primarily through planning fees associated with NSIPs and major development proposals. Any landscape input required to support plan-making activities will be funded through the Plan Making Grant received by the Council in March 2025.

Although the contract extension runs until April 2028, the arrangement will be subject to regular

review. Either party may terminate the contract at any time by providing one month's written notice.

Alternative Options Considered (if appropriate):

Option 1: Recruit an in-house Landscape Architect

This option was considered when the current arrangement began. However, ongoing local government restructuring creates uncertainty around long-term staffing. The workload linked to major infrastructure projects is also variable, making a permanent role less cost-effective. Continuing with external support provides greater flexibility and avoids recruitment delays and costs.

Option 2: Do not extend the contract and manage without specialist landscape support

The Planning Service does not currently have the specialist landscape expertise needed to assess complex infrastructure and major development proposals. Without dedicated support, there is a risk that important landscape impacts would not be fully identified, leading to poorer outcomes for communities, the environment, and development quality.

Option 3: Appoint a different external consultant through a new procurement

A new procurement would cause delays and require a new provider to become familiar with ongoing projects. This would risk losing continuity and momentum at a critical stage in major infrastructure proposals. Retaining the current provider ensures consistency and represents better value for money.

Background/Reports/Information considered and attached:

N/A

Legal implications:

In accordance with paragraph 10.2, item (g) of the Council's Code of Procurement, an exemption from the requirement to undertake a competitive procurement process has been approved for this Category C procurement. The exemption enables continuity of specialist landscape support in line with existing contract arrangements.

The proposed contract extension does not materially change the scope of the original services. A new short-form agreement will be put in place to formalise the extension and ensure appropriate checks and balances, including review and termination provisions. Subject to compliance with the Council's internal governance and contract management procedures, no significant legal risks have been identified.

Financial implications:

The total value of the contract extension, up to a maximum of £120,000 until April 2028, can be met from existing budgets. The cost of landscape support relating to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and major planning applications will be funded primarily through planning fees associated with those developments.

Any landscape support required to assist with plan-making activities will be funded through the Plan Making Grant received by the Council in March 2025. No additional budget growth is required because of this decision.

The use of external specialist support provides flexibility and cost control, allowing expenditure to

be aligned with workload and avoiding the fixed costs associated with recruiting and employing a permanent member of staff.

Portfolio Holder Signature:

Date:

Councillor D Laws, Portfolio Holder for Planning

7 January 2026

Please forward to Democratic Services upon completion

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**Date copy passed to
Democratic Services 07/01/26**

**Implementation Date: 14 January 2026
(if not called-in)
(Allow 5 clear working days after publication
of decision)**

Circulation: Democratic Services, Portfolio Holder, Officer and Accountancy.